

GGA Study Tour

Investigating Grower Group Business Models



AIMS

The tour seeks to engage with Victorian and SA grower groups and key partners, in order to:

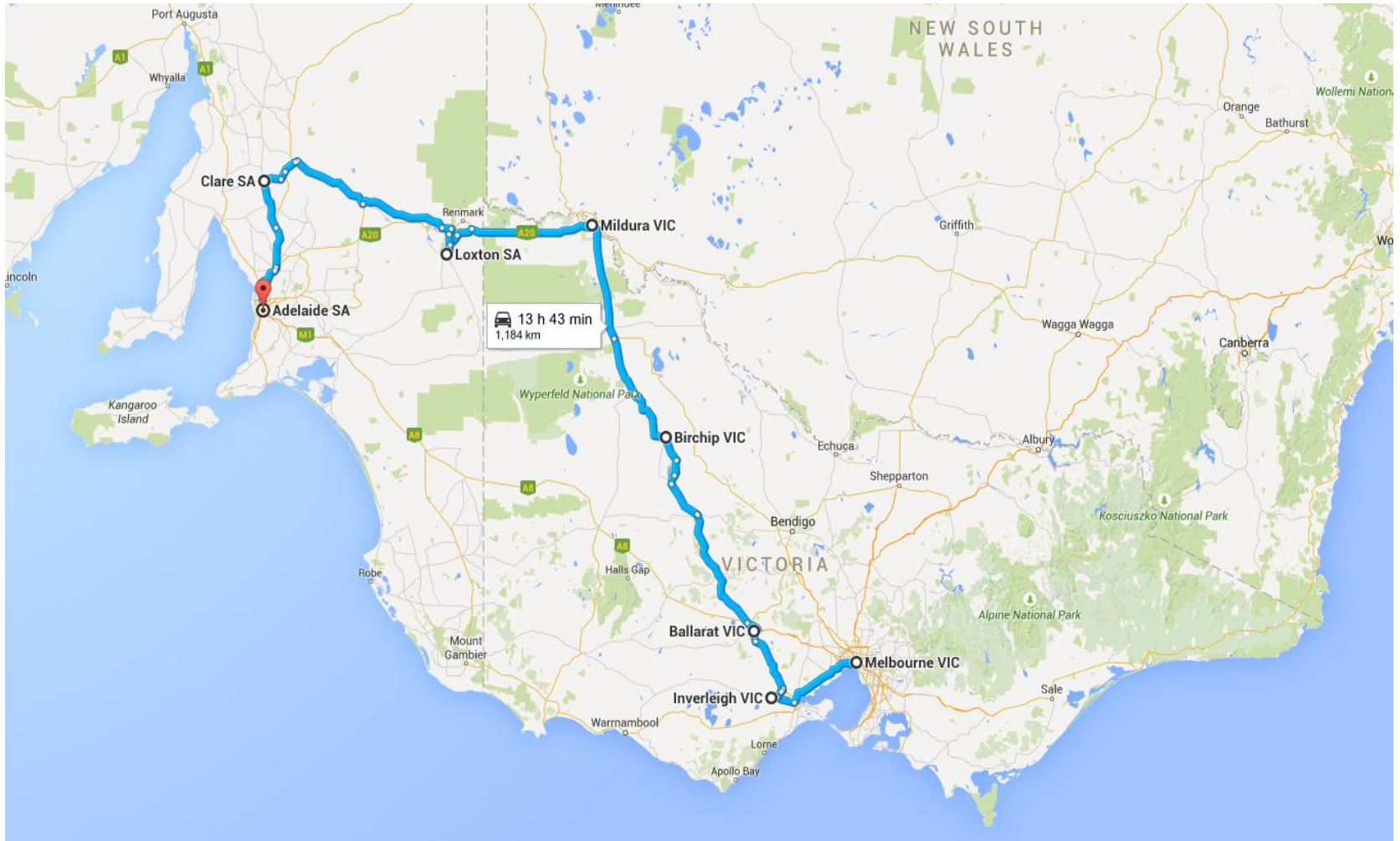
- Understand how groups and organisations work together to create greater value for the industry
- Share grower groups models (including financial, research and extension frameworks)
- Seek to develop better collaboration framework for grower groups in national projects

Five groups represented

- Fitzgerald Biosphere Group
- Southern DIRT
- Corrigin FIG
- North East Farming Futures
- GGA



Where we went



The dream



The reality



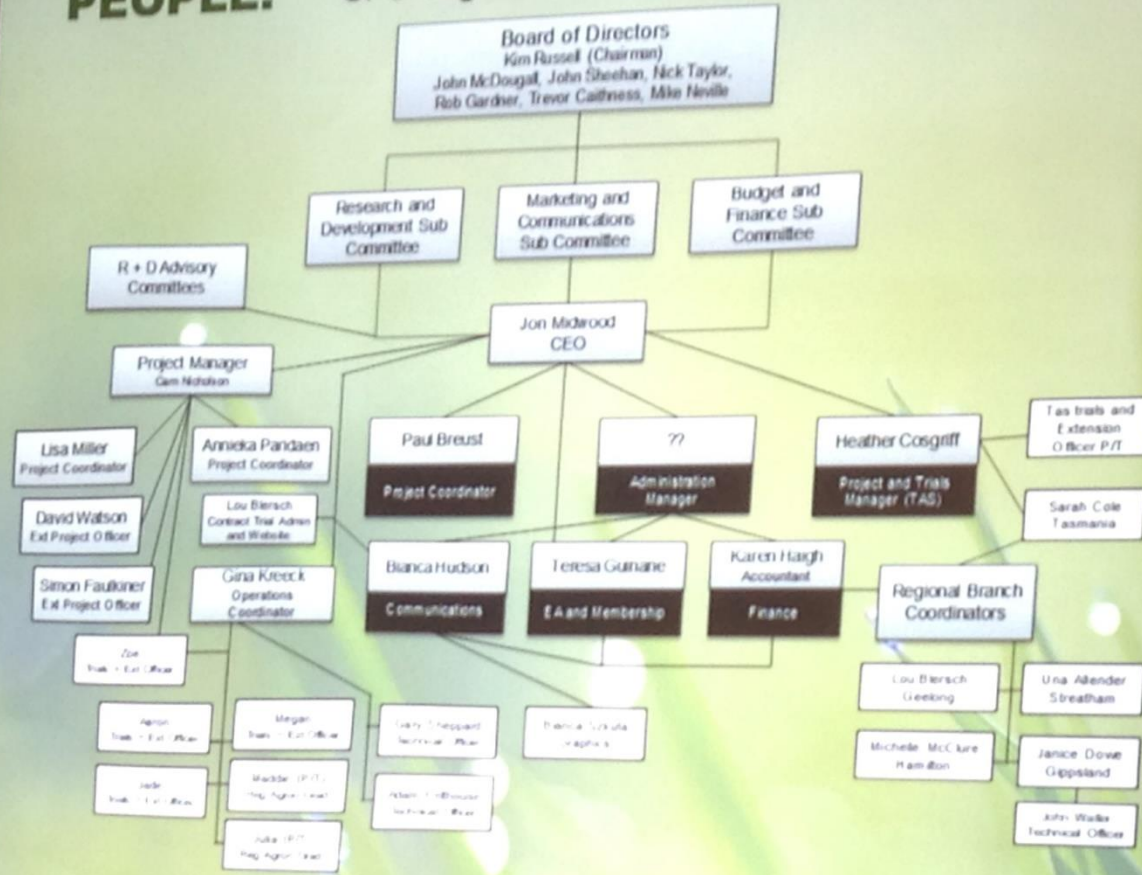
Southern Farming Systems

- Located Southern Victoria and Tasmania.
- 5 branches, each with a part time co-ordinator.
- Company Limited by guarantee, Not for Profit
- Mixed Farming, High rainfall. 500-900mm
- Main role to disseminate white coat language to farmers



PEOPLE:

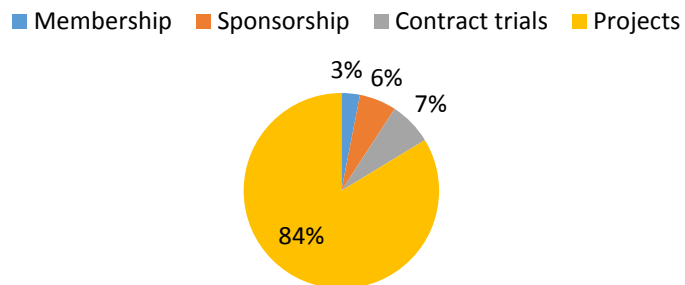
SFS Organisational Chart 2015



- Membership \$200 annually
- Paid chairman and board members expenses covered

Income

- Income
 - 3% membership
 - 6% sponsorship
 - 7% contract trials
 - 84% projects (75% GRDC, 14% Government)



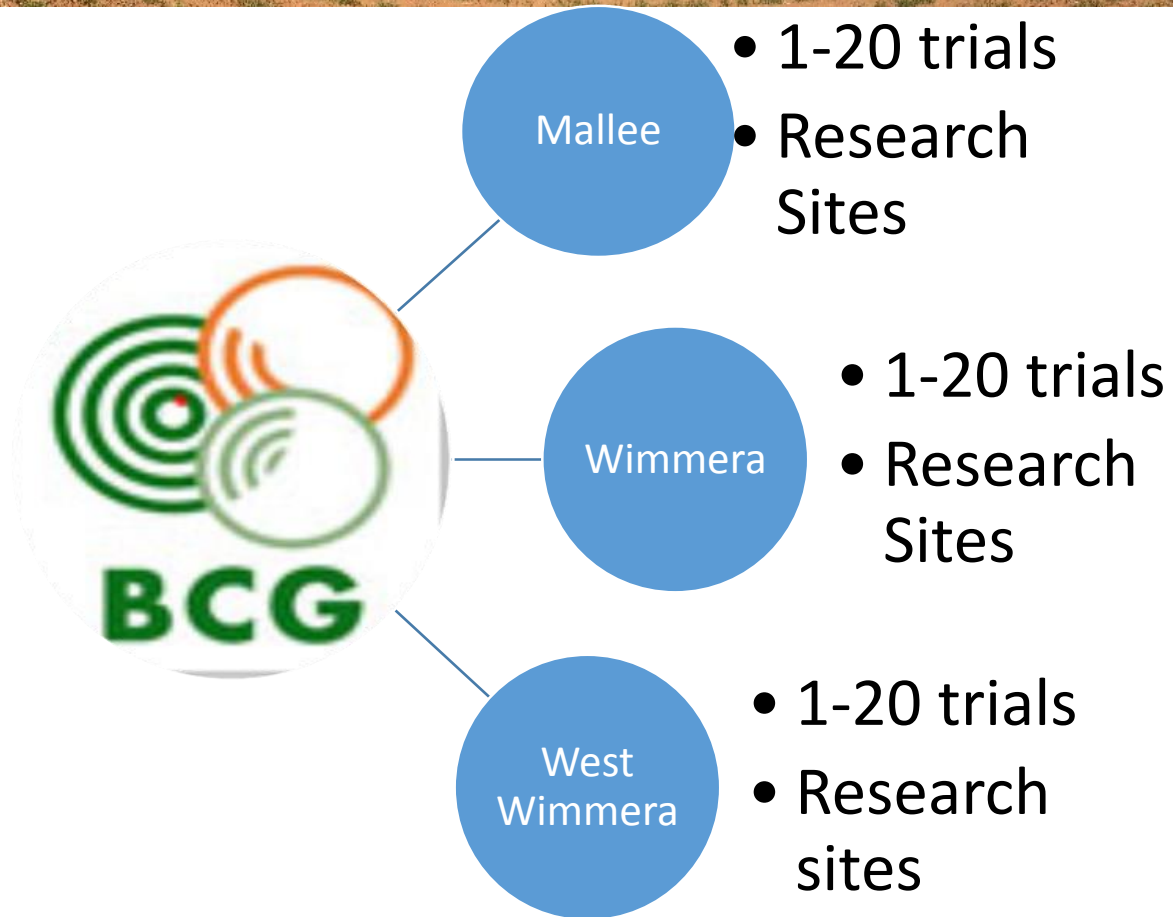
- Feels that there needs to be less focus on membership numbers but more on grain production
- Changing nature of the commercial agronomy sector has changed some of the dynamics
 - What impact does this have on grower member numbers
- Project development – don't restrict group activities through current capacity
- FUTURE: funding extension is a big issue. Numbers at field days dropping. Competition from corporates. Sponsorship is getting harder (for machinery)

Birchip Cropping Group

To improve the prosperity of farmers and agricultural communities through farmer driven innovation

- Established in 1992
- Managed by a Board (2 long term, 6 local famers, 4 skills based)
- Average farm size 2500 ha.
- Economic Value of Agricultural Output \$500K
- 430 members
 - Cropping membership \$474
 - Livestock \$275
 - Combination (cropping and livestock) \$566.50
 - Friends of: free (weekly newsletter)
- 20 permanent and part time staff
- 110 research trials (50 corporate)
1500 trial plots!





EXTENSION

- Farmer driven 1st, project driven 2nd, research driven 3rd
- Finish events with an inspirational speaker
- Pop-up exhibits and short sharp presentations.
- Industry only day - (\$7K per corporate entry)
- Expo day budget \$120K
- Field days attended by 600+
- Loads of smaller seasonal field walks
- Women's Agronomy Group. Ladies days both in field and venue based popular

CONTRACT WORK

- Trial work, soil sampling, grain analysis \$\$\$\$
- Opportunities they are pursuing: technology, drones, BIG data, Livestock, extracting better value from capital tied up in land ownership. Social research on the “critical breaking point”



CHALLENGES

- Getting farmers to events
- Chasing funding
- Incorporating all generations
- Staying relevant in a project driven industry
- Size - is bigger better??



Mallee Sustainable Farming

- 19 years established
- Livestock returning into farming systems
- 350mm rainfall, Mallee soils
- Landscape scale - not tied into any particular community
- Project funded - no membership fee for the last 2 years
- Members are anyone who walks in or attends an event (database)
- Free events
- Lack agronomy support in low rainfall areas

- Board
 - 6 farmers (2 from SA, NSW and Vic)
 - 4 invited specialists – governance, HR, marketing and science
 - 2 year terms with split turn overs
- Partnership critical for MSF – particularly delivery partners
 - Group staff (4) can't cover all their region
 - Key partners include Moodie Agronomy, CSIRO, PIRSA, DEDJTR (Vic)
- Group is funded through projects
 - Develop projects, but get contractors to implement & manage trials
 - Direct a lot of money out to other organisations and consultants – not a lot stays with the group
 - E.g. trials and measurements subcontracted out to Moodie Agronomy, CSIRO, DEPI etc.
 - Moodie Agronomy – nearly 100% of his work is through MSF projects. Not a traditional private agronomist, solely research agronomy.



Hart Field Site Group

- Farmer driven, pro-active !
- Only staff is one trial coordinator
- 12 person Board; 6 geographically represented farmers and 6 industry reps
- Used to have 3 tiered membership but now user pay system including all field research books
- Don't own equipment but do the monitoring. Contract out trial management.
- Own 100ac, commercial crop grown on land not under trials
- BIG on independence and unbiased as a group
- Corporate reps big at field days





EXTENSION

- Field Day- attended by 600 +
- Staggered speaker program-3 talks per day per site
- Smaller field walks through season
- Workshops on fence line weed control (HR), Spray Drift, Yield Prophet
- Crop Update morning and Business Updates in the afternoon
- Sponsorship sub committee

Conclusions

- Reiterated need for research to be farmer driven first; project driven second; research driven third
- Financial challenges are Australia-wide - project funding & sponsorship
- Membership: growth & retention whilst working with commercial agronomy sector.
- Be creative with business models and collaborations with other organisations
- WA has a leading model for grower group collaboration and co-operation

*Thank you
for the opportunity*